

As monsoon recovers, Kharif sowing lag drops below 5%

Three-week break hits acreage under oilseeds, pulses and millets

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With the monsoon picking up pace again and covering the whole country, sowing of Kharif crops is also showing signs of recovery. The lag in the sown crop area is now less than 5% in comparison with last year's, an improvement from almost 12% two weeks ago.

The biggest continuing lags are in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, where the three-week hiatus in the rains has resulted in lower sown area for rain-fed crops such as coarse cereals, oilseeds and pulses. This gains importance in view of the fact that rising prices of edible oils and pulses have been major contributors to recent inflation trends.

Uneven spread

Though the monsoon rainfall is now just 2% below normal, the overall figures hide both geographical and temporal unevenness. In the third week of June, the mon-



Brisk pace: Farm labourers planting paddy in a field at Rajgarh village near Dakala in Patiala. ■PTI

soon halted its progress across central India, resulting in a three-week delay in rain during a crucial sowing season.

According to the India Meteorological Department, Madhya Pradesh, parts of Maharashtra, interior Karnataka and Telangana received excess rainfall in the last week of July, bringing their cumulative rainfall for the season up to normal. Guja-

rat, however, remains in the deficient category, along with eastern Rajasthan. Overall, a third of the districts across the country have seen deficits so far.

According to Agriculture Ministry data, the total sown area across all crops as of July 30 was 848 lakh hectares, 4.7% lower than the 890 lakh hectares sown at the same time last year. A week ago, the lag was almost 9%. In

mid July, the lag was 11.6%.

The main Kharif crop is paddy, which is seeing a 4% drop in acreage in comparison with last year's, mostly from eastern India where the sowing window is still open.

Millet area down

Coarse cereals and oilseeds are both showing a lag of about 5.6% with shortfalls in Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh. Ragi sowing is down by a third, with a 31% fall in crop area from last year's. The area sown with jowar is down by 11%, bajra 9% and small millets 81%.

Maize is the only cereal which is holding steady with no difference from last year's. Groundnut coverage is down by 10% and soybean still lags 3.4%.

Among pulses, the area sown with moong dal is 10% lower than last year's, while urad lags 9%. Arhar dal sowing, on the other hand, is proceeding briskly, with a 4% gain in crop area so far.